

## **Sick Day**

by Jeremy Johnson

Jonathon sat up from his pillow, his mother abruptly tidying his t-shirt and bed sheets as properly as one could make them appear. “You’re late already,” she scolded him, “This isn’t for nothing, you know. You’d be in the living room if it weren’t for that fever.”

“Yes mum,” Jonathon replied with a groggy tone.

“Five, four, three and...” His mother quickly dashed out of the room. A panel at the end of the bed flickered on, and a tiny green light on the top blinked twice. “And that is why the oceans are studied-Ah, good morning Jon. Glad you could join us today.”

“Good morning Mrs. Gimble.” He replied, as courteously as a 12 year old could.

“How are you feeling?”

“I’m alright. Little fever, but I think I’ll manage.”

“Well good, we were just learning about marine biology, if you’ll take a look.”

Jonathon reached a tiny notebook, which, upon opening, displayed a colorful digital screen. Notes, post-its, and moving videos of marine life neatly flowed throughout the tablet.

A line towards the bottom of the page blinked twice. “Here we are Jon.”

“Yes ma’am.” The single line towards the bottom of the page blinked once again, and a larger paragraph dropped down from it. Jon placed his finger on it, wobbling the paragraph back and forth. As the teacher read the paragraph, the words were gradually highlighted.

A tiny sphere popped up at the top of the screen. “Hey, this is boring. I want to get out of class already.”

Jon smiled and pressed his finger on the message. A tiny keyboard virtualized on the screen, and he quickly replied. “Teacher is boring, as ever.”

Mrs. Gimbles’ voice stopped abruptly. She could see quite easily who was chatting with whom from her Teacher Display. Jon and David’s nodes were blinking together, with a tiny line connecting them.

“Now, the chatter has got to stop. Pay attention. Don’t make me disable chat, Jon and David, I’m talking to you.”

The two quickly closed the message box.

“As I was saying, marine biologists in recent years have been able to revolutionize ocean exploration. With the new submarines, humans are able to go to the deepest parts of the sea. Today, we will be joining them first hand.”

“If you would please put on your Vis-Life glasses and headsets, we can get to the fun part.”

Jon quickly reached over to his night stand. A simple, but blocky visor with connecting headphones was resting there. He placed a finger on the earpiece, pressing it twice. A blue light flashed three times, then went green. He placed it over his head, and the screen powered up.

“There we go class, David—Visor please. Thank you.”

The only thing Jon could now see was black, and the only thing he could now clearly hear was his teacher’s voice. It sounded like she was in the same room.

“We begin our journey crawling into Moby 7, our handy submarine.”

The screen suddenly was illuminated with a crystal clear video of the bow of a ship. Below are the choppy waters of a windy day at sea. Jon quickly is focused. To his sensual perception, he feels he is nearly there.

The camera slips down into Moby 7, a rather spacious submarine with a wide array of control panels, and scientists.

“The Moby 7 is dropped down into the ocean, usually around 11 AM. Note the time the submarine dials. Also, note the controls and pressurization.”

As Mrs. Gimble narrates their adventure, she is operating with the visualization, commanding popups on the screen to show her students just where everything is.

The Moby 7 makes a dashing drop into the water, and as the bubbles clear, a flood of marine life swarms around.

“Down we go!”

The submarine goes deeper, and Mrs. Gimble describes in visual detail every species that they pass by, noting the depth, the pressure, the speed of the submarine. The students are by now deeply involved in the experience. This was the best part for Mrs. Gimble. She was a story teller, and virtual immersion technology was a gift for anyone who could narrate, or wanted to narrate their own documentary.

“Here comes the spooky part. You can enable 1st person, to see what the cameras are seeing, or look through the windows of the submarine. There are very scary creatures down here, so I recommend the latter, children.

The brave kids do their best, enabling the first person cameras. It doesn't take long before they switch back, terrified of the glowing hordes of jagged teeth and nightmarish fish.

“Life may have begun here, and life may be similar to this on planets with deep oceans and volcanic activity. We will be passing over just such a spot in a moment...”

A volcanic vent comes over the horizon, beyond the lights of the ship, smoke bellows out of deep crevices on the ocean's bedrock. Beyond the plumes, swarms of giant tube worms dance in the hot streams. Various digital tags pop up, labeling every species. Students may interact with the environment if they take an interest in any particular organism.

“Please note that the Europa Mission, scheduled to arrive in eight months, may discover similar creatures on Jupiter's icy moon. I'll leave that one for another time.”

Mrs. Gimble smiles as the adventure comes to an end. “Time to resurface!” Water splashes over the visor, or at least, it appears to. The class is back on the surface, exhilarated after their first deep sea dive.

Jon's mother smiles from the doorway, seeing her son so immersed in his studies. He had already completed a majority of classes, and could graduate within a year or two. But, he wouldn't. She knew his interests were far too varied to move onto Stage 2 classes so soon. He would first learn how to operate the space telescopes, and effectively touch-down on Mars.

Jon calmly removed his visor and looked up. “Mum, is it brunch time?”

“Yes dear, come to the kitchen. I've made you ham and cheese. Your favorite after a good expedition.”

“K Mum. Let me tell you about life around volcanic vents!”

Jon's mother smiled, and the two went to the kitchen for an informative lunch overlooking the Australian deserts, with not a soul for miles to interrupt them.